

# KITCHEN SAFETY

The kitchen is one of the most dangerous rooms in the house. It contains many hazards that can cause burns and unintentional fires. Every year, more than half of residential fires start in the kitchen, the largest category for causes of residential fires. It's important to recognize proper heating and cooking equipment functions, and to know how to extinguish a grease fire. Taking steps to protect young children from these heating and cooking appliances can prevent damaging fires, injuries and loss of life.

## Ovens and Ranges

Always make sure the oven and stovetop is clean. If not, clean them thoroughly and safely. Residue grease and food can catch fire.

Keep pot handles turned inward, away from the edge of the stove. Don't wear long, loose sleeves that can hang over the stove while cooking.

An electric burner coil can reach a temperature of more than 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit. This can ignite clothing even after the coil has been turned off. Flammable fabrics, such as towels, dish rags or curtains can be ignited merely by being used or stored near a gas or electric range. Vapors from contact cement, gasoline, cleaning fluids or other flammable liquids can be ignited by the pilot of the kitchen range.

## Children in the Kitchen

Children and kitchens aren't a good mix. Continuous and adequate supervision of children in the kitchen is of prime importance. As a child's mobility and curiosity increases, appropriate supervision becomes essential.

Keep all hot items at a safe distance from a child.

Keep the child at a safe distance from all hot items by using highchairs, child safety gates, playpens, etc. Create a safe zone for children. Keep them out of the household traffic path and check for their location before moving any hot or heavy item.

Remove tablecloths and placemats when toddlers are present. They can tug and pull on everything within their reach. Hot or heavy items can be easily pulled on top of them. Never give children pots and pans to play with. Children may reach for this "toy" when it contains hot liquid or food.

An oven door can get hot enough to burn a youngster who might fall or lean against it. It can be particularly dangerous for a child just learning to walk who may use the door for support; the child is often unable to let go before suffering a burn. Keep small children out of the kitchen when the oven is in use.

## **Grease Fires**

If a grease fire erupts in a pan on top of the stove, quickly and carefully cover the pan with a lid or a larger pan. Never use water. If the fire is in the oven, turn the controls off and close the door tightly. This will smother the flames. Better yet, have a portable fire extinguisher handy and know how to use it. The Fire Department recommends having a 2A10BC fire extinguisher in the kitchen; make sure it is charged at all times.

If you suspect there may be fire still smoldering somewhere in the cabinets or the woodwork after such an experience, don't hesitate to call the fire department.

## **Appliances**

Use only appliances that have received an Underwriters' Laboratory or Factory Mutual testing label.

Do not allow appliance cords to dangle over the edge of counter tops or tables. Children may pull at them and injure themselves. Or you may catch them unintentionally and pull them off the counter.

Do not overload electrical circuits. Unplug appliances when not in use. If an appliance smells funny, doesn't function correctly, or has frayed or broken wiring, have it repaired or replaced.

## **Microwave Ovens**

Burns associated with the use or misuse of microwave ovens are increasing. The scald burn is the most common type of burn and most involve the hands. The age distribution is rather broad, but there continues to be a large number of young children who sustain the more serious burns. The single most common cause of burn injury is simply the fact that people do not expect items heated in the microwave oven to present the same risk as items heated by other more conventional means.

Many people do not fully appreciate or understand how the microwave oven heats food. The fact that a food container may not be hot may mislead an individual to assume that the food itself is not really hot - thus a burn injury occurs.

## **Behavior**

The single most important prevention measure is to read and follow the directions. The directions associated with the operation of the microwave oven and the specific directions associated with heating prepared or packaged foods are equally important.

Use a pot holder or appropriate utensil to remove lids and coverings from heated containers to prevent steam or contact burns. This also is necessary when removing items that may have been heated or extended periods of time - the container may be hot.

Be sure children are old enough to understand the safe use of the microwave oven before allowing them to heat foods. Children under the age of seven may not be able to read and follow directions and are at a higher risk potential than older children. Their height is also an important factor. Some manufacturers do not recommend that their products be heated in a microwave oven. Be sure you follow their recommendations. (For example, some baby

foods are not to be heated in a microwave. And jelly-filled donuts can be a major source of mouth burns.)

Use caution when handling and cutting thick pieces of meat after heating, especially meats with considerable fat. Spattering of hot fat and meat juices may occur.

## **Environmental Control**

Puncture plastic pouches and plastic wrap covering before heating. This will reduce the risk of a vapor pressure build up and prevent steam burns.

Put a cut in potato skins or other vegetables to reduce the risk of "bursting" when you cut into it after it is heated.

Eggs should be removed from the shell before being cooked in the microwave oven. The egg in a shell may explode causing both mechanical and thermal injuries.

Identify containers, dishes and utensils that are safe for use in the microwave oven. Some items are not "microwave safe" and may become very hot or even burst when heated in the microwave oven.

When using smooth vessels for heating liquids, place a plastic spoon in the vessel during the heating process. This will prevent the "super heated" phenomenon that may result in liquid spattering and scald burns.

Check for the presence of metal when reheating some "fast food" items. Aluminum foil, staples in bags, twist-ties, etc. may become very hot and ignite combustible containers.

Children who are permitted to operate the microwave oven should be tall enough to be able to safely remove items from the oven. One major risk is facial burns, which occur among children whose height puts their face at the level of the heating chamber of the microwave oven.

## **Design Intervention**

Check with the dealer or manufacturer to determine if the microwave oven you choose can be installed where you wish to install it. Proper ventilation and control of moisture exposure may be important considerations for many microwave ovens.

Purchase only microwave ovens that have a "fail safe" mechanism, which will shut off the power when the door is opened or will prevent the door from opening when the oven is operating.